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**COUPLE FOUND GUILTY OF FORCED LABOR**

**GREENBELT, Maryland** – Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, and Ralph F. Boyd, Jr., Assistant Attorney General of the United States Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, today announced that a federal jury returned guilty verdicts today against Barbara Coleman-Blackwell, age 33, and her husband, Kenneth Blackwell, age 37, of Takoma Park, Maryland on several offenses arising from the exploitation of Margaret Owusuwaah, a native of Ghana who was sent to and worked in the Blackwells' home as a nanny and domestic servant.

The jury convicted Coleman-Blackwell of forced labor, document misconduct in furtherance of forced labor, conspiracy, and harboring an illegal alien for financial gain. The forced labor and document misconduct convictions are the first in the country under a new law, passed by Congress in 2000, which was specifically designed to combat human trafficking. Blackwell, who was not charged with forced labor or document misconduct, was convicted of conspiracy and harboring an illegal alien for financial gain. The jury acquitted Coleman-Blackwell and Blackwell of encouraging an alien to come to the United States, and acquitted Coleman-Blackwell of making false statements to American government officials and visa fraud.

The case stems from allegations that Coleman-Blackwell's mother, Grace Coleman, who has been a Member of the Ghanaian Parliament since 1997 and served until last month as Deputy Minister of Finance, sent Margaret Owusuwaah to the United States to care for the Blackwells' toddler daughter and perform domestic services around the home, promising to pay Owusuwaah for her services. Evidence offered at trial showed that from the time Owusuwaah arrived in February 2000 until the night she escaped in July 2001, Owusuwaah provided around-the-clock care for the Blackwells' daughter, cooked the Blackwells' meals, cleaned the Blackwells' home, and, at Coleman-Blackwell's insistence, performed such tasks as removing Coleman-Blackwell's shoes at the end of the work day and bringing Coleman-Blackwell a bowl of water at meal time to wash her hands. Contrary to the initial promise to pay, neither Coleman nor the Blackwells paid Owusuwaah for her work. Additionally, Coleman-Blackwell took much of the money Owusuwaah earned caring for other people's children and cleaning other people's homes. Until the night of Owusuwaah's escape, Coleman-Blackwell and Coleman successfully forced Owusuwaah to continue working by using various means of coercion, including confiscating and hiding her passport and visa, not permitting her to leave the Blackwell home by herself, confining her to her work duties, especially her duties toward the Blackwells' daughter, and threatening that if she ever complained about pay or did not do as the Blackwells requested, she would be arrested, deported and jailed.

"Today's conviction is a reminder that the Justice Department is committed to prosecuting human trafficking and related crimes, and to ensuring that those who engage in these crimes are firmly punished," said Ralph F. Boyd, Jr., Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. "The defendants in this case cruelly exploited an innocent woman."

Coleman-Blackwell faces a maximum sentence of 20 years imprisonment on the forced labor charge and 5 years imprisonment on the document misconduct charge. Coleman-Blackwell and

Blackwell each face a maximum of 10 years imprisonment on the charge of harboring an illegal alien for financial gain and 5 years imprisonment on the conspiracy charge. Both defendants are subject to a maximum fine of \$250,000. Each may also be required to pay restitution to Owusuwaah. Sentencing is scheduled before the Honorable Alexander Williams on August 21, 2003 at 9:30 a.m. This case is the result of an investigation by the Bureau of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service, with assistance from the Baltimore Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Daphene R. McFerren and Trial Attorney Seth Rosenthal, from the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division.